

Abstract of the Invention

Systems, methods, components are provided all for the purpose of controlling access to decryption keys needed to decrypt ciphertext. A key release agent is provided which controls decryption key distribution. The key release method starts with receiving an encrypted key, key related information and decryptor information from a decryptor and determining a whether a private key corresponding to the key ciphertext is available. Upon determining the private key corresponding to the key ciphertext is available, a decision is made based on decryptor information of the decryptor and the key related information whether decryption of the key ciphertext is to be permitted. Decryptors adapted to participate with the KRA in the above described key distribution methods are also provided.